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SPIES

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The task of keeping tabs on Soviet spies preying upon the high-tech and military installations in San Diego County is a full time job for federal and local law enforcement agencies.

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Officials from various civilian and military agencies believe that scores of Soviet intelligence agents are operating within the county but admit that they are not fully aware of the extent of the threat.

'We think we're doing a good job with resources but we're not aware of the total threat, said Winston Kuehl, Regional Director for the Naval Intelligence Service.

'The Navy is working in a joint effort with any federal agency who has an intelligence agency,' said Kuehl.

San Diego is the busiest crossing point along the Mexican border and is a favorite hunting ground for Soviet agents anxious to acquire American secrets, according to Stanislav Levchenko, a KGB agent who defected to the West.

Levchenko told reporters in San Diego this week that KGB agents often operate from Mexico because they are free from American surveillance.

'We are really limited with the Soviet activity in Mexico,' said Gary Penrith, the special agent in charge of the FBI's San Diego office. 'That's why it's an ideal place for them to meet. The Soviets don't have to meet in San Diego; they meet in Tijuana.'

The monitoring of Soviet activity across the border is the domain of the Central Intelligence Agency.

'We simply can't talk about alleged activities,' said Patricia Volz, spokeswoman for the CIA in Washington.

The sheer volume of legal and illegal immigration through San Diego makes it difficult to spot agents coming across the border.

Aliens from European countries are often caught trying to slip across the border illegally, but it is difficult to tell if they are looking for jobs, or American secrets, said Harold Ezell, Regional Commissioner for the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

'We have caught a number (of people) from Communist Bloc countries,' Ezell said. 'Some have asked for asylum. It's my opinion that there must be a greater emphasis on the intelligence we get in this area.'

The San Diego Police Dept. has a unit which looks into complaints about security at defense plants and turns the information over to federal authorities.

Charles Brown, a spokesman for General Dynamics, refused to comment on security arrangements at the defense contractor's San Diego plant.

He did, however, relate the story of some Soviet shoppers who applied a sticky substance on the soles of their shoes just before touring an unidentified aircraft plant. The visitors apparently were trying to pick up metal chips that might give the Soviets a hint about the kinds of aircraft produced in the plant.